

CSIRO Publishing

# Emu



Volume 100, 2000  
© Birds Australia 2000

All enquiries and manuscripts should be directed to



**CSIRO**  
PUBLISHING

*Emu*

CSIRO Publishing  
PO Box 1139 (150 Oxford St)  
Collingwood, Vic. 3066, Australia

Telephone: 61 3 9662 7622

Fax: 61 3 9662 7611

Email: [emu@publish.csiro.au](mailto:emu@publish.csiro.au)



Birds Australia

Published by CSIRO Publishing  
for the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union

[www.publish.csiro.au/journals/emu](http://www.publish.csiro.au/journals/emu)

# Obituary

## W.B. EMISON 1939–1999

William Bert Emison, Bill to friends and acquaintances alike, died on 15 December 1999 after a short illness. Born in Boise, Idaho, he spent his childhood in a family which encouraged interest in outdoor activities. He gained a B.Sc. (Zoology) at the University of Montana in 1962. Following this Bill (and T.L. Riggert) determined to visit Australia and en route the pair worked in New Zealand where Bill studied introduced trout for the Department of Internal Affairs before becoming involved with American research in the Antarctic. Bill worked on the diet of Adélie penguins, supervised by W.J.L. Sladen and received an M.Sc. through Johns Hopkins University in 1967. His pioneering work (Emison 1968; *Antarctic Bird Studies* (ed. O.L. Austin), pp. 191–212) allowed the development of foraging studies which avoided the sacrifice of returning adults or recently-fed young, a methodology that was later refined and used on an expanding range of bird species. Subsequently, he worked on the Whistling Swan and undertook studies in the Aleutian Islands before arriving in Australia in 1972.

After a year with the NSW Department of the Environment, Bill moved to the Victorian Department of Fisheries and Wildlife where he ran a unit which conducted wildlife surveys on crown lands. This unit, the first of its kind in Australia, provided information to the Land Conservation Council for its development of additional parks and reserves.

At about this time, the RAOU was initiating its first *Atlas of Australian Birds*, and Bill was investigating grid systems for use in Victorian surveys. The Fisheries and Wildlife Department started to develop the *Atlas of Victorian Wildlife* to include records held by the Museum of Victoria.

This database, with over two million records was the backbone for the text of the review of the state's avifauna (Emison et al. 1987, *Atlas of Victorian Birds*. RAOU and Department of Conservation, Melbourne). It also provided substance for much of the text of the later production on mammals. The database is now an essential and authoritative part of research and planning within Victoria.

While continuing wildlife surveys, Bill began species-specific studies. Having worked on the Peregrine Falcon with Clay White (Brigham Young University, Utah), Bill established some ecological background for the species within Victoria, replicated results obtained elsewhere and provided a strong basis for subsequent work. But his interests and enthusiasm did not rest there; in time he was to study a range of other birds including White-bellied Sea-eagle, Long-billed Corella, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo and Red-



tailed Black-Cockatoo, and actively participated in research on Malleefowl and Black-eared Miners.

Retiring from the Victorian Public Service in 1994, Bill published material on Peregrine Falcons and returned to his early passion — the study of Antarctic ecosystems. He took up a Ph.D. scholarship with Deakin University, and began examining the biogeography (and taxonomy) of some *Eusirus* amphipods. While much of the basic laboratory work was finished, and a revision of two species in press, Bill's untimely illness did not allow him to complete this study.

Bill was not a man to promote himself; he did not seek acclaim for his work or for his undoubted expertise. He was known for his valued contributions to debate on a range of issues; he served for a while as secretary of the RAOU but took no formal part in other organisations. Bill was unfailingly generous and patient with peers and subordinates alike. He was calm, a quiet achiever, a man of rigour and perception tempered by a wry humour. He left behind a background of valuable publications, an enhanced understanding of Victorian avifauna and a database whose importance increases with time. He also left behind a coterie of like-minded colleagues which, having benefited from his training, advice and knowledge, has pursued his interest in the conservation of Victoria's fauna, a pursuit based on collection of adequate background information before proffering management advice.

In his career, Bill published some 60 papers in national and international journals and a host of more informal (but authoritative) productions or reports, quite apart from presenting innumerable lectures and talks at symposia, workshops and meetings. He is survived by his wife, Mary, and daughters, Suzanna and Rebecca. It is our privilege to have known him, and to have had the opportunity to have been part of his life. With his family we mourn his passing.

F.I. Norman and S.J. Cowling  
(with the assistance of Bill's friends and colleagues)